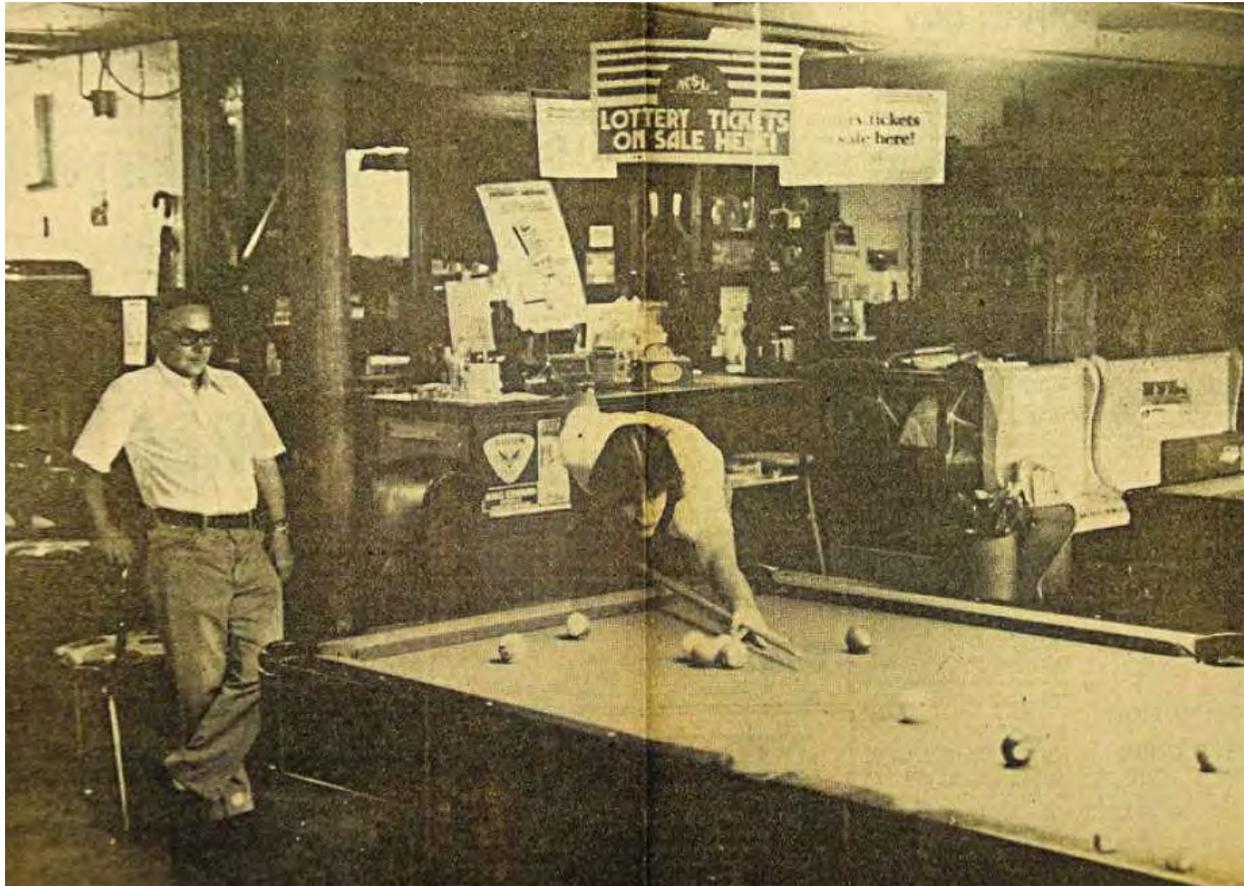




Romancing the Foam No. 116

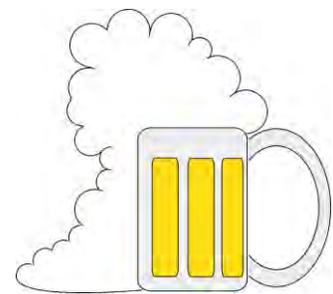


Shorty's Pool and Card Room – it was Midland, Michigan's – my home town – den of iniquity. Midland was a white bread company town – a Stepford wives kind of place with high morals and no character or color where everybody aspired to a lifetime job at Dow. Shorty's was the one place your parents definitely did not want you to go and probably the one place where no one even remotely known by your parents would be to tell them that you were there. The place originated in the mid-20's, moved around time a few times and when I was old enough to know about it had settled in a basement off Main Street. You walked down a hill and entered through a side door. The place had a pre-war or perhaps early 50's vibe where you expected pool shooters named after cities and card players with two first names. The majority of Shorty's denizens took their style cues from James Dean. A cloud of blue cigar and cigarette smoke hovered just under the ceiling and would grow downward as the night progressed. More than once I got grounded for smoking even though I didn't smoke at the time after a stint at Shorty's because my clothes reeked of smoke. The sentence for smoking was lighter than the probable punishment for being at Shorty's. Shorty (Harold Robinson) had a size befitting his name. The pool tables were the full-size kind – not the little dinky ones you found in bars. We'd bike or thumb down there after school – or skip school. Shorty tolerated us if we did not look too young, behaved and did not put our cigarettes on the edge of the table. As the evening progressed, real pool shooters would

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take our places at the pool tables and card players began to fill the card tables. By 6 or 7, Ira – they called him Tiny – he was 6’6” and well north of 600 lbs. – would take up his position on a card table and people played for real money. Ira usually did well and he was fun to watch. Ira had the banter down and he could read people. Ira would have agreed with Amarillo slim: “Look around the table. If you don’t see a sucker, get up, because you are the sucker.” Ira was never the sucker. It was exciting. Hundred-dollar bills laid strewn on the card table and more than once people played pool for car titles. And, if you needed beer there was usually someone down on their luck at Shorty’s who would buy you a six pack for a buck or two. I usually bought Meister Bräu because it was different but by the late 60’s it went light and by 72 had been sold to Millers. There was some kind of kerfuffle with the city fathers about gambling at Shorty’s in the mid-60s and the card games migrated to Ira’s house, a few blocks away. They were still big money games and we would watch once in a while. Ira died in 74 and Shorty’s closed 42 years ago on June 17, 1976. It was a fifty-year run. Shorty’s health went south and those dinky pool tables in local taverns and cards for seniors at the Community Center provided too much competition. Shorty’s was a portal into a different time and space filled with excitement and comradery where young boys learned that life was not all Boy Scouts, slot cars and Little League and that was not a bad thing.



So this month, I am drinking some beer to celebrate Shorty’s and places like Shorty’s. Clown Shoes Vic Secret Space Cake Double IPA (9.0 % alcohol by volume) has an excellent name for the occasion. You would expect someone named Vic Secret with a slicked back DA and a pack of Lucky Strikes rolled up in his t-shirt sleeve exposing bulging tattooed biceps and a fag with a one-inch ash dangling out of the corner of his mouth sitting at Shorty’s with a pool cue waiting for a shot. Vic Secret Space Cake Double IPA is a hefty Double IPA brewed with Australian Vic Secret hops. A hazy gold (SRM 7) pour produces a 3" off-white foam cap that takes 5 minutes to reduce to a sticky 1/2" film. Continuous streams of very fine bubbles slowly rise from the bottom of the glass. Luxurious aromas of grapefruit, citrus, orange, melon, tropical fruit, bread crumb and a hint of earthiness flow from the glass. Rich moist cakey caramel bread flavors wrap around tropical fruit and melon flavors with malt growing by mid-palate and then the fruit return with an assertive grapefruit rind bitterness. While the hop flavors and bitterness are medium high the malt flavors are big enough to tame them and soften any rough edges without reducing their featured status. While slightly sweet up front the hops squeeze it towards dry and in the end, the bitterness hangs. The beer clears to bright as it warms. Vic Secret Space Cake has a very creamy body, full and rich with soft, medium carbonation. For as much alcohol that is listed on the bottle, the alcohol warming, and alcohol



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flavors are mild. Nothing is hot or harsh. A big, muscular beer to be savored. I rate Vic Secret Space Cake 90.



Insight Brewing Taming The Devil's Companion is another beer with a name that goes with the ambiance at Shorty's or at least the low opinion of the place held by Midland's patrician class. It is an English Porter with 5.3% alcohol by volume. Malt rules the aroma with smells of nuts, spicy malt and faint chocolate. It pours deep dark brown under a two-inch lacy tan cap with good retention. The palate is nutty with faint chocolate. A medium high bitterness balances a medium malty sweetness producing a high-priced gourmet chocolate note that lingers into the finish. There are no harsh or burnt roast flavors. The beer is very creamy and smooth with a medium body and medium carbonation. I have had this both on tap and from the can and I like the canned version better. I rated the tap version 80 and the canned version 87. The canned version is creamier and smoother. This is a very pleasant and satisfying

afternoon drink and one I would choose for drinking while shooting pool or hanging out watching a high stakes card game.

Pipeworks Brewing Company Something Hoppy This Way Comes (10.0% alcohol by volume) has a name that recalls Ray Bradbury's **Something Wicked This Way Comes** and evokes the tension between good and evil and the portrait on the label looks like the kind of person one might have found at Shorty's from time to time. The beer is an American Double IPA (aka Imperial IPA). This smells like a big beer - citrus, melon, tropical fruit, light herbal, floral, faint green vegetation, caramel, mild alcohol, and medium low biscuit aromas rise from the glass. It pours gold with a light haze as streams of bubbles rise rapidly to join a lacy 2" off white blanket of foam with good retention. The palate starts mildly sweet featuring citrus, tangerine, melon, and alcohol leading to a bitter citrus peel and rind finish. The alcohol is smooth and mildly warming but it grows on you as you drink. The body is



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surprisingly light for a beer this big and it is lusciously creamy. The development of citrus flavors in this beer and their interaction with the balancing bitterness is fantastic and makes this beer a joy to drink. I rate it 85.



Despite its reputation as a den of iniquity, no one I ever went to Shorty's with was any worse for the experience – none descended into a life of crime or immorality – and all were probably somewhat improved by the experience. The raw underbelly of Midland was never that raw and it provided an important contrast to the rest of the white bread town. For me, Shorty's planted the seeds for going elsewhere. I left in 68 and never returned. Of the three beers, for playing cards or shooting pool, I would stick with the Devil's Companion. For reminiscing and toasting Shorty and those like him, the two Double IPA's are a sure-fire bet. Rack 'em up Shorty!